

California M E D I C I N E

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EDITORIAL

Voices for Medicine

OFTEN THE MEDICAL PROFESSION's reasons for opposing some politically sponsored medical care plans that have been hatched in recent years have not been made fully available to whatever portion of the public can be influenced by logic.

Time and again the profession is identified simply with the fact of opposition and not enough with the sound reasons it has for opposing.

What seems to be lost sight of is that the medical profession is not opposing plans for better health for more people but is trying to keep illogical proposals from diminishing the vigor and usefulness of a way of practice that has brought the best of medical care to the people of this country.

Unfortunately, many of the plans that our profession has to oppose are spectacularly bountiful ones that may seem, without analysis, to be good—hence are “popular.” Our role, on the other hand, is the stern and “unpopular” one of opposition and denial; and we frequently do not play it articulately enough or before a large enough audience to make our reasons influential.

Physicians know immediately that some of the proposed social and political proposals are wrong. They know that the interjection of a third party between the physician and the patient is a step in the wrong direction, especially where the third party is a governmental bureaucracy which pays the piper and calls the tunes.

Even with this knowledge, however, physicians are faced with the herculean task of proving their contentions to the people without the emotional appeal that gets attention for our politicians' proposals. The politician need only introduce a spectacular bill into his legislative body to gain headlines. The physician, replying, is immediately placed in the position of a defendant and is blandly asked: What better have you to offer?

There is a better answer for many of the proposals which some legislators toss so freely into the law-making mill. Medicine's answer has been, and remains, the promotion of voluntary health care plans. This includes the stimulation of individual responsibility and of home rule—“state's rights,” if you will—reduced to the individual home and individual community.

In the onrush of social planning which has swept the country in recent years, physicians have not been too well recognized or their views accepted in the public press and the public eye. Their “image” has not been very good.

They have, however, had a host of supporters among the thinking groups of the country, the business and other professional men who recognize that a threat of socialization of one profession will necessarily lead to the socialization of all.

With this thought in mind, the California Medical Association is about to embark on a program of carrying the message of the medical profession to other groups. This will be done through the medium of the spoken word. In short, through a speakers' bureau, organized, educated and skilled in presenting to various groups of the public the true message behind medicine's stand in favor of individual effort and in opposition to total reliance on government to solve personal problems.

A committee has been appointed by the C.M.A. Council, with the assignment of analyzing the task, preparing material, training representatives and then making public appearances in behalf of the profession.

Much has already been accomplished in the planning stages of this activity. A list of speakers—men known for their ability to state facts convincingly and with warmth and sincerity—has been selected as the first contingent. Timely topics for public discus-

sion have been selected and subjected to the research needed to prepare factual presentations. Other organizations have been contacted so that they may be informed of the availability of qualified speakers from the ranks of medicine. Plans are being made for the preparation of comparable material to be used by county societies and their members in meeting speaking requests in their own areas.

If one qualified and respected medical speaker can make an impression on an important group of representatives of other lines of endeavor, medicine's image will be improved. If such a result can be multiplied time and again, the image will be still further improved. As a by-product, the spoken word delivered in this manner may make news which will bring the printed word into play. This combination may go far in the image-improving effort.

The "image" is subject to many treatments and can be changed by a variety of media. John D. Rockefeller changed his image by giving away shiny dimes, Andrew Carnegie by endowing public libraries.

Medicine's opportunity today appears to be through the use of the spoken word. If truth is to prevail and if truth can be widely disseminated by the spoken word, here is the opportunity for image-changing. It is unfortunate that a change is indicated but since this is the case, this seems a splendid way to start the conversion process.

Congress on Medical Quackery

ONE OF THE perennial plagues in our country, as in all countries, is medical quackery. Whether it be the witch doctor with his incantations and exotic brews or the more modern slicker with his electronic neon-tubed gadgets, there seems to be a continuing fraternity of those who would enrich themselves at the expense of human suffering.

Today's quacks are concerned primarily with cancer, a disease which has so impressed itself in the fear portions of the brain that its real or fancied victims are exceptionally prone to a quack attack.

Control of quackery and the problems of stamping it out or impeding its spread, have long occupied one part of medicine's overall program. The American Medical Association has for many years devoted a great deal of effort to this task. More recently the A.M.A. has been joined by the Post Office Department, the Federal Food and Drug Administration and the Federal Trade Commission.

To gather together some of the stored information of these forces and to explore the possibilities of further control, the A.M.A. has scheduled a Congress on Medical Quackery to be held in Washington, D. C., in early October.

From the pooled resources of these groups there will likely emerge some specifics for the protection of the public interest against the charlatans. The public interest demands some action and this appears to be an excellent starting point.

